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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: NATURAL DISASTERS IN CHINA AND BURMA;
U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage May 13 on the massive earthquake in Sichuan Province, China, and on the temporary shutdown of Taiwan's debt-ridden Far Eastern Air Transport Corporation (FAT).

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said the earthquake in Sichuan and other recent issues constitute great challenges for China, while it eagerly pursues its rise in world politics. A column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" said the natural disasters in China and Burma provide good opportunities for the world to review whether the two regimes are civilized or not. A column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" talked about several issues facing the United States, China and Taiwan after Ma Ying-jeou was elected Taiwan's new president. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" criticized the United States' attitude towards Taiwan based on AIT Director Stephen Young's remarks in a press conference held on May 8. End summary.

13. Natural Disasters in China and Burma

A) "May 12 [earthquake in Sichuan, China] Recalls of September 21 [1999 earthquake in Taiwan]

The "Black and White" column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] wrote (5/13):

"... The earthquake [in Sichuan, China] happened during the power transition between the old and new government in Taiwan. We also expect the DPP government could express timely solicitude to the Chinese victims based on humanity and should not be reserved or too cautious to take action because of its political viewpoint. After all, [Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian administration has provided aid to [the victims] in Burma's floods [caused by Cyclone Nargis]. There is no reason to turn a blind eye to the devastating earthquake on the Mainland.

"Although the earthquake is a searing pain to the Chinese victims, it even makes the Beijing authorities 'head scorched and forehead bruised' [Ed note: meaning it puts them in a very difficult position]. The opening of the Olympic Games is less than three months away. Who would have thought that just after the drama of boycotting the Olympic torch, a massive earthquake would now occur. Troubles from inside and outside make the joyous Olympic Games seem like 'the head covered with dust and the face covered with dirt.' In the [present] circumstance of 'internal disorder and foreign invasion,' the Beijing authorities should experience difficulty with their so-called 'rise.' If the political structure cannot receive credit from the world, and the economic infrastructure cannot stand the test of incidents such as a massive earthquake, then it will not be easy to have a real 'rise.'

"[Chinese Premier] Wen Jiabao issued orders to provide relief to victims [when he was] on his plane headed to the disaster area yesterday. He said, 'think of the people and do everything for the

people.' If 'the rise of China' can adhere to the highest principle of [pursuing] the welfare of 'the people,' China can acquire a more rigorous [basis], which will make China more apt at dealing with challenges from inside and outside. The Olympic torch's facing boycotts everywhere and the relentless earthquake occurring in the pandas' habitat are like major apocalypses on the road to of China's rise.

"The Taiwan people who have suffered seriously from the September 21 (1999) earthquake should express concern to the Chinese victims in the May 12 earthquake."

B) "A Touchstone of Civilization"

The "Free Talk" column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] wrote (5/13):

"There are more and more disasters on the earth. Hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes are heard often and [these disasters] easily take tens of thousands of lives. Disasters are able to temper and refine human beings' noble souls. By the same token, disasters can also reveal a regime's level of civilization. ...

"Burma victims [suffering from the Cyclone Nargis] lack of food and medication. The junta instead insists that relief from the outside can only be put into their hands and distributed by them. [The Burmese junta] tries to take credit for other people's achievements and tries to deceive the Burmese people, who are barred from all information. Besides, [the Burmese junta] disallows international media to conduct interviews inside the country; tries to hide the truth from the public; and covers up such a huge disaster. When the junta's big officials went to give comfort and show concern to victims, it was surprising to see those victims lead their whole

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families to stand outside the temporary tents to greet those high officials. Such an authoritarian government is extremely brutal and ridiculous.

"Unfortunately a massive earthquake occurred in China yesterday. The scale [of the earthquake] was not less than the Tangshan Earthquake [in 1976]. When the Tangshan Earthquake occurred, Mao Zedong was still alive. People could see the level of [Mao's] autocracy and authoritarianism [judging from the reality] that the news of a disaster with more than tens of thousands casualties could be blocked totally. The level of China's autocracy at that time was about the same as that of the Burmese junta. A massive earthquake has now occurred thirty years later. By China's performance in disaster relief, do people in the world have the chance to review whether [China] is more civilized and has made more progress?"

14. U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations

A) "[Taiwan's President-elect] Ma Ying-jeou Takes Office; New Face Appearing in United States, China and Taiwan Relations"

Kuo Chen-lung, the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the China Times, wrote in the "International Column" of the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (5/13):

"... Most people in Taiwan advocate that the economy go first and that politics move [more] slowly. But why the Mainland has to release economic [benefits] to Taiwan while there is no political gain [from Taiwan]. If there is no mutual understanding between each other [Taiwan and China] on future progress, it will be very difficult to have further cooperation.

"After Ma Ying-jeou was elected, in the new triangular United States, China and Taiwan relations, the Taiwan side has stabilized. But [the Taiwan side] cannot be hampered or decided by the other two sides [the United States and China]. We, Taiwan, carry small weight, so we can only influence the other two sides by having bigger movements.

"On the aspect of bringing Taiwan to the edge of danger, [Taiwan President] Chen Shui-bian's words and behaviors were not advisable. But on the aspect of shaking up the triangular relations, Ma can

learn some tricks from Chen."

B) "If That's How You Treat A Friend"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/13):

"No one, not even president-elect Ma Ying-jeou, could have been surprised last week when American Institute in Taiwan Director Stephen Young informed him that Washington had turned down his application to visit the US before his inauguration next Tuesday.

"Despite the upbeat sound bites issued by Washington following Ma's victory and its ostensible desire for better and closer relations between Taipei and Beijing, last week's rejection was a sign of the shape of things to come.

"Closer cross-strait relations or not, the US State Department and the White House are not about to change their longstanding policy of barring high-ranking Taiwanese government officials from visiting the US, which during President Chen Shui-bian's eight-year tenure served as a stark, if not humiliating, reminder of the reality of great power politics.

"Another aspect of Washington's approach to Taiwan that is unlikely to change is the desire to sell it weapons.

"To wit, news that a Ma visit to the US was 'not necessary' had barely registered when Young announced that the US remained committed to helping Taiwan modernize its military. To be fair, though, one thing did change this time around: It seemed that encouraging Taiwan to import US beef was now a top-line policy, as Young mentioned it in the same breath as the F-16s.

"What this meant was that Washington could continue to yield to Beijing's pressure and humiliate its ally, but please, please, buy our weapons and our beef. We're your friend, as long as you remain a market for our goods.

"This position is the result of different branches of government vying for different outcomes, and Young's speech was the channel through which these contradictory discourses were voiced. While the White House and the State Department seek to mollify Beijing through engagement and the avoidance of sensitive issues such as Taiwan, others - such as the Pentagon - continue to seek to provide Taiwan with appropriate armaments, which is sure to anger Beijing.

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"Sadly, while it isn't Washington's intention to humiliate the Taiwanese leadership or its people, the consequence of such public announcements is that other countries and international organizations will have no compunction in treating Taiwanese as second-rate global citizens.

"In other words, Beijing's pressure on other countries isn't the only factor in how the international community has continued to snub Taiwan's efforts to be recognized as an equal.

"Young's diplomatic slap in the face will have repercussions on how the WHO, to use one example, will deal with Taipei's application for membership or observer status later this month; or sports organizations, to use another, will continue to bar Taiwanese athletes from participating as Taiwanese or unfurling the national flag when they win a medal.

"After all, if the world's only superpower and an ally of Taiwan can publicly treat it primarily as a market for its products, why should lesser partners care about it?"

YOUNG